

*Prior to going back out to Mystery Cave again we spent a lot of time preparing. We made a squeeze box, which is a wooden box the opening of which can be adjusted in size. We could then crawl through the opening and measure to see how tight of a squeeze we could fit through. From that we were able to determine that I need about 8 inches in height to get through the smallest portion of Floyd's Tomb. That meant we would have to scrape out about an inch from the floor of the passage. We also learned that the best position I would need to get through the passage would be on my stomach, with my arms by my side. And of course, my head would be turned one way or the other. That position allowed my shoulder blades to drop to their lowest point. In order to move I would push forward or backward with my toes. It sounds difficult, but felt adequate. Later it proved to work sufficiently.*

The second thing we did to prepare was to construct the tools we invented to work with in the cave. I came up with a clever way to chip away inside of the passage without having to climb inside. I had my neighbor weld together several lengths of steel pipe in a manner that would allow us to take it apart while we climbed down to the Tomb, but still have the strength necessary to hold up to a blow from a hammer once it was together. We made our own tips that we could screw into our pipe to reach the area we needed to work on. B came up with a cool design for a scraper using angle iron. He had his neighbor weld it together. It proved to be an invaluable tool for scraping and removing the rock. We were both proud of our inventions! I also made a device to hold my drill that attached to our pipe. We ended up not using it since B's scraper device worked so well.

I took an oath. I made a vow. I would not leave the cave until I had made it through the passage; conquered Floyd's Tomb. This WOULD be the trip. It had been a long time since we had been out to Mystery. We had been busy, though. We had made the tools we had talked about. It was fun coming up with ideas for tools. Also, we made a squeeze box to determine the best technique for getting through the tight spot. Plus we knew about how much rock we need to remove before we could get through.

We were excited to get back out to the cave to finish our project. Our climb down to the passage took a little bit longer than usual since we had extra tools to carry. Once we got down to the passage we immediately got to work using B's scraping tool with the pipe I had made. It worked like a charm! We could hammer the pipe on one end and the scraping tool on the other end dug into the rock. Then we could push the debris all the way through the passage and out of our way. When we needed to measure our progress we would turn the scraper sideways in the passage and observe the clearance.

We worked for about 2 hours before I had a desire to try the Tomb. I just wanted to make sure I was going to make it through on the first try. B made one more sweep of the passage floor, clearing any loose rocks from where I would be crawling, and pushing the wall we had made to the back of the squeeze. I made preparations for the crawl by fashioning duct tape "suspenders" to prevent my shirt from sliding around while sliding across the rock. I went with a flashlight in my hand, even though my hand would be at my side. I knew I would need it once I got through. As an expression of faith I did not tie a rope to my feet. I was confident I was going to make it. Finally, I made the attempt.

*Although I didn't mention it in my journal, we did notice the breeze was back, and the rumbling present.*

*Since we didn't do any work to the entrance I had to go through the same dance routine to even enter the passage. Once I got my upper body through the hole I shined the flashlight ahead of me to work out a plan of attack. The passage didn't seem any bigger than last time I was there, but most of the work was done deeper in the squeeze. I paused for a few minutes, then twisted my hips to get my lower body in. I slowly inched forward as my entire body slowly filled the passage. Before I was completely in I got into position for the push. I dropped both of my hands to my side and turned my head to the right. Then I began to inch forward. Once my toes were inside the cave I used them to push forward. To keep from scraping my body I would "walk" using my shoulder's, knee's and toes. Progress was slow but steady. That*

*was fine by me. A foot or two before the tight spot I could already tell there was a little more room. Even so I began to touch the roof of the passage with my back. This time, however, I was able to continue moving forward. I reached the lowest point in the passage and I could tell it was still going to be tricky. Even with the work we had done clearing out the loose rocks I still felt sharp pebbles rolling under my chest as I slid along.*

When I could feel my back brushing the top of the passage in several places, I reverted to my technique of exhaling. Before I began, however, I took a minute to lay there in the passage. I could see the glow of B's flashlight as the rays of light managed to squeeze past my body. I could feel the cool breeze evaporate the drops of dirty sweat on my forehead. I could feel a thousand sharp edges dig into the surface of my skin. I felt the twinge of excitement as I realized that the goal we had set out to achieve weeks ago was about to be realized. This thought alone made me want to keep moving, no matter how tight the passage became. I breathed in and out rapidly for a few moments, then began.

Exhale.

Scoot.

Stop to catch my breath.

Repeat.

After just a few inches of scooting I could raise my head off the floor of the squeeze and tell that the passage was beginning to open up! I relayed this information to B and we both took a few seconds to celebrate! during the rest of the slide through the passage B was cheering me on. "Virgin passage!" and "Neil Armstrong territory" were the phrases he kept repeating. I was grinning ear to ear.

Even though the passage was beginning to get larger, it was still slow-going. I had to continue scooting along for another foot and a half before I could slide my arms underneath me to use them to

crawl. At that point I felt my journey was essentially over. I was able to sit up slightly and move the rock "wall" we had erected several trips ago. Those rocks served as a somber reminder that a little caution would be wise.

I shouted back to B that I was through! We both took a moment to congratulate ourselves on our success. B would likely never be able to squeeze through the passage and see what I was seeing, so I gave him a description of what the cave looked like. At this point I only had my mini-mag, so I could not see very far into the passage. The end of the passage made a gentle right turn and seemed to go for a ways. I was unable to do anything at this point but sit, due to the size of the passage. All of the broken rocks we had pushed through Floyd's Tomb were around me at this point. There were no other signs of human intrusion. I had to wait until B passed me my helmet light to get a better feel for the cave.

B used the pole we made to slide me the end of a rope. Then I was able to pull all of my gear through the squeeze. The first thing he sent through was my helmet and light. After I got the light fired up I was able to see our new section of cave. OURS! It was an exciting experience to see the results of hours of hard work over the course of several weeks. At this point we still had no idea what the cave had to offer. The only thing I could see was the passage immediately following the squeeze. It was a narrow passage with a low ceiling. I would easily be able to get through it, but I would have to crawl. I began taking pictures so I could show B.

I asked B how far he thought I should venture into the new cave, in light of the strange events that had occurred. For the first time he, too, toned down his enthusiasm as he remembered the noises. He slid the pipe through the Tomb with a loosened tip on the end. He said I could use it as a weapon if I ran into an animal or ...? He also told me to make sure we could hear each other as I progressed into the cave.

*Even though we were at least thinking of the possibility of running into trouble, we never really considered the fact that if I got into*

*trouble B would never be able to rescue me, and in fact no one would be able to get to me for many hours. If I were in serious trouble, as in hurt, there was no way anyone would be able to get to me in time. But, symbolic of the whole experience, we were focused on our goal, and not the potential dangers we faced. So far we had dodged the proverbial bullet. So far...*

I strapped on my gloves and kneepads, grabbed my camera, and began my adventure. I crawled through the passage pictured above which was about 20 feet long. At the end the crawl the cave bent slightly to the right. I would have to climb up a gentle slope, but then I would be able to stand by the end of the next section of cave. The next section was about 40 feet long. In addition to having a higher ceiling, the walls were a little wider than the section I had just crawled through. Both sections were relatively straight. The floor was covered a rock which crunched as I crawled, and then walked across it. The walls were basically the same as much of Mystery Cave, except pristine. It was obvious no one had been there before me. Upon closer examination of the walls I found two delicate types of formations. The first resembled several chunks of grated cheese tied together on one end, with the rest of the "cheese" just flopping down. The second formation was just tiny strands of rock, thinner than human hair. It looked pretty cool. I found several examples of both kinds of formations.

I was not even through the second section of cave and I could barely hear B. Caves passages are not very acoustically friendly. I shouted to him that I would go for 1/2 hour then return. He said that would be fine, and to be careful. Then I proceeded to explore some more. I could walk nearly upright at this point. I was on the third straight section of the cave when I discovered a crystal formation on the wall to my right. It was in several layers on the wall, resembling clear candle wax that was allowed to melt and drip down the wall. There were several small stalactite-looking formations formed by these crystals. The longest was about four inches in length. There would have been one much longer, judging by the size of the base, but it had broken off. I looked to see if I could locate where it ended up but I couldn't find it.

The passages continued on for another 100 feet or so before the cave opened up a little. It was at the end of a short straight segment of the cave. At the very end of the segment the cave made a bend to the left and opened up into a room. Just at the point where the room began there was a round rock that appeared to be leaning against the wall. This seemed odd, but singular formations are common in caves so it is by no means unique. I had crawled and stepped over several large chunks of rock that fell down from the ceiling, but this one was more round than the others. Once past the rock the room opened up to a height of about 15 feet. It was about 15 feet in width and about 30 feet in length. At the far end of the room there was another passage leading straight out.

As I entered the room I had an eerie feeling. It was like the old saying that I felt like I was being watched. Once again the excitement of the new find faded, and the memories of the mysterious side of the cave crept back into mind. Suddenly I felt VERY alone. Fortunately for my ego I was nearly out of time and had to get back to B before my half hour was up. I took several pictures of the room. I was going to just get a feel for how long the next passage was when something caught my attention. On the left side of the room on the wall at about eye-level I discovered what appeared to be hieroglyphics! It was a single drawing that almost appeared to be just part of the rock coloration. It looked like very crude representations of people, standing below a symbol. I was pumped! This meant that there had to be another entrance to this cave. Even if the entrance was closed or blocked it might mean an opportunity to open it and get B into the cave. I took another look at the drawing to make sure I could describe it to B. Then I took some more pictures and headed back to B.

When I got back to the squeeze I could barely talk fast enough to let B know everything I had discovered. He was just as excited to hear about our newly found treasures. As we debated what our next move would be I began to send my gear back through the Tomb to B. I told him it would be best if we got someone else to

come back with me, in case something happened. He agreed. Once I got all of my gear through I was face with the wonderful task of having to negotiate Floyd's Tomb again.

*Theoretically a person should be able to get out of a passage he just crawled through by simply reversing what he just did. If he contorts his body a certain way to get in, he should be able to get into the same position to get out. In practice this may not prove to be possible or practical. Such was the case with the Tomb.*

I determined in advance that I would attempt to go head first back through the squeeze. I knew that I could definitely make it by going feet first, but that would mean backing up all the way through the Tomb. That would take a long time and be very exhausting. My only concern in going head first was when I got to the end of the squeeze. I would have to get through the hole we had made without the benefit of being able to twist my body. Oh, well. I chose to go head first and deal with the exit when I got to it.

I started into the squeeze very close to the tight spot, so at least I would have it over with soon. It turned out to be tricky getting through. I had to shift my hips to the right a little to get through. But I just kept plugging away at it. My hands were once again by my side. My head was turned to the right and I was scooting with my toes. And once again I was using my head as a gauge to tell when I was at the tight spot, then when I was past it. I seemed to get tired a little quicker on the way out. Must have been from all of the work we had done to get through.

I was a little over half way through when something bizarre happened. I was laying there taking a brief break when I heard a sound deep within the cave. It was the faint, but distinct sound of rock sliding on rock. My blood froze in its veins. I couldn't move. I just lay there straining to hear the sound again. Nothing. I quickly began to scoot toward the exit. I didn't mention the sound to B, but I did recall one of our earlier trips when B said he heard the same thing.

The task of getting out of our hole turned out to be as painful as I thought it would be. I had to put my arms overhead and force my shoulders through the hole. I definitely left some skin behind as I slipped through. B helped me as I wiggled my upper body out of the passage. Then I could catch myself and ease my lower body out of the Tomb. I was out!! B and I shook hands and began to load up our gear. I was trying to listen to any sounds coming from the hole, but we were making too much noise gathering our stuff. As much as I looked forward to getting into the passage, it was a relief to get back out. That is pretty much how I feel about caves in general. I love to go in, but I feel good when I get back out again.

Something strange happened with the pictures I took in the new part of the cave. The pictures I took in the passage leading up to the large room all turned out just fine. Strangely none of the pictures taken in the room turned out! Pictures of the round rock, and more importantly pictures of the "hieroglyphics" I saw. Pictures taken before and after the room turned out great, but the negatives of the photos taken in the room were clear! Nothing. I remember what the hieroglyphics looked like so I drew a picture to give you an idea of what I saw.